

Breathing Lights continues vacancy dialogue

2016 was the year of Breathing Lights. Director Barb Nelson served as Lead Architect for the Project with SUNY Professor Adam Frelin, as Lead Artist. Together they conceived of a lighting effect designed to make hundreds of vacant buildings appear to be breathing with light. TAP provided logistics and construction administration services, as well as fiscal management and community engagement guidance. Please visit www.breathinglights.com to enjoy the stunning photos and links to dozens of works by regional artists and local youth interpreting the Breathing Lights. Following are excerpts from an article authored by Charles Duncan of the arts journal Brooklyn Rail:

Breathing Lights is a large-scale, multi-city public art installation that aims to draw attention to vacant residential buildings in the Capital District of New York State. It is a highly ambitious initiative: hundreds of abandoned and “zombie” structures, chosen largely along streets of row houses within distressed neighborhoods, pulsate with light...mimicking the respiration of living, breathing humans. A winner of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge, *Breathing Lights* unites artists and architects with the mayors of Albany, Schenectady, and Troy, as well as dozens of community and private-sector partners, to realize and engage eight months of programming and events such as youth media projects, building reclamation clinics, community arts presentations, gallery talks, and policy discussions.

Hardscrabble, real-world counterpoints to the saccharine glowing cottages of the late Thomas Kinkadee, these buildings advertise their agency as once (and hopefully future) centers of human kinship. Pulsating like fireflies, often they stand alongside occupied residences, courting suitors with whom they hope to reenter the intimate dance between dwelling and inhabitant. As a mark of its success, *Breathing Lights* engenders observations beyond the lit buildings’ windows; one begins to notice the even larger number of additional abandoned or derelict homes scattered throughout the neighborhoods...eerily emblazoned with a large red X, warning firefighters that the structure may be unsafe to enter, like an added scarlet letter of shame upon the dejected. The good news is that many of these abandoned homes are substantial stone structures with significant aesthetic value, and attention being afforded to them through this project may ultimately ensure their preservation.

Breathing Lights is being realized by a large constituency that ranges from elected officials to neighborhood ambassadors to community volunteers. Frelin initially envisioned the installation as a primarily visual spectacle, but upon visiting homes abandoned in haste and littered with personal affects, began to appreciate them as metaphors for individuals, each with



Breathing Lights. Stanley Street, Schenectady, NY. Photo by Hyers and Mebane



Breathing Lights. Troy opening night, 9/30/2016 Photo by The Foundry for Art Design + Culture

Owners to reap the benefits of tax credits

Two well-known Troy buildings – the former Mooradian’s furniture store and a former factory commonly known as “American Seal” – have been listed to the National Register of Historic Places after being nominated by TAP.

While recognizing the significance of these properties, National Register listing also is the first step in accessing preservation tax credits, which generate hundreds of thousands of dollars in future tax breaks, or upfront equity to finance the rehabilitation.

The expansive Mooradian’s, at 599 River Street, was originally a collar-making factory built in 1899 by Wilbur, Campbell, Stephens Co. The building was listed because of its association with Troy’s global preeminence in the manufacturing of detachable collars and cuffs from about 1880 to 1920. The city’s 19th century industrial might was closely tied to collar-making. The non-profit Community Builders is converting 599 River Street to 67 affordable apartments.



The American Seal Building at 669 River Street, Troy

The second Troy building, American Seal, at 669 River Street, is a simple brick factory built in 1899 by the William Connors Paint Manufacturing Co., which rode the wave of popularity of “ready-mixed paints” to reach national stature. It made the American Seal brand well into the 20th century. Connors Paint was among the last of River Street factories to use water power drawn from the Hudson River. A rare surviving tail race, or stone and concrete vault, still extends from a turbine room, from which it channeled water back into the river. The building is expected to hold a restaurant and upper-story apartments. The former School 1, at Sixth and Ingalls Avenue, Troy, also is slated for nomination. It is being re-used to house 28 market-rate apartments.

In close proximity, the three Troy buildings tell the story of largely immigrant populations that settled near work, church and school in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The recent financial investment in their re-use is a positive indicator for continued renewal in North Central Troy.

A fourth building, the former John S. Tilley Ladders Co., in Watervliet, also was named to the State Register in December. Once the nation’s oldest ladder manufacturer, the sprawling brick complex now holds 62 market-rate apartments.



New Habitat homes, 220-224 Orange St., Albany

TAP designs ambitious round of new houses for Habitat for Humanity homeowners

Habitat for Humanity continues to use the prototype homes that TAP designed, which meet the Habitat design guidelines and are cost-effective to build. Of the six new single-family row homes that TAP designed last year for Orange Street in Albany, three homes have been sold while the remaining three are under construction with an expected spring completion. TAP also designed a group of three new row homes as infill housing at 130-134 Lark Street. Construction will begin this spring.

In Troy, Habitat obtained two brick multi-family homes from the Troy Lank Bank, at 3320 and 3322 Sixth Avenue. TAP provided construction drawings for a full renovation of the buildings, converting each to a two-family, with a rental unit on the first floor and a large owner’s unit on the second and third floors.

TAP extends tax credit expertise to Albany, Schenectady

TAP's historic preservation tax-credit services have extended regionwide since the agency began offering them in 2013. The tax credits represent a lucrative way for developers to reduce their tax obligations, or to access upfront financing of projects should they sell them to other investors who want the tax breaks. Tax credits are worth 40 percent of the cost of rehabilitation, so credits achieved on large projects can be worth millions of dollars.

In return, developers must adhere to federal preservation standards. TAP helps property owners meet preservation standards. Some of the projects involving TAP include:

- Two large mixed-use projects on North and South Pearl streets in Albany. Three former department stores, now joined as one office building facing N. Pearl Street, are planned as a mixed-use complex including 35 new apartments. A row of commercial buildings at 40-50 South Pearl Street, is slated as storefront retail spaces, with 15 upper story apartments.
- Public School No. 1, Sixth Avenue, Troy. The 1911 school, designed by Marcus F. Cummings and Son, is being converted to hold 28 market rate apartments.



Hotel Foster, Schenectady

TAP helps agencies improve lives of people with developmental disabilities



TAP in 2016 continued working with Community Workshops and Independence (CWI) and Warren, Washington and Albany Counties ARC (WWAARC), to improve living arrangements for their developmentally challenged clients. TAP worked with these agencies to identify needed quality of life improvements, life safety upgrades and generally make the homes nicer places to live.

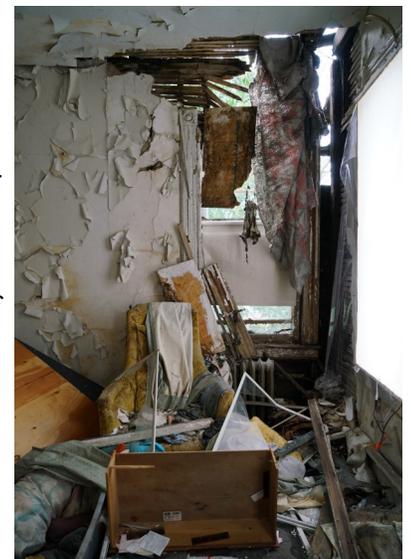
Two projects, Highland Court in Albany (WWAARC) and Ryan Avenue in Queensbury (CWI) were redesigns of existing vacant homes which created living space for a total of 9 developmentally disabled adults. Another, at Faxon Street in Glens Falls, added new space and safety features to a home already in use by clients to allow an additional resident to move in.

Land Banks look to TAP for services



The TAP staff are experienced with the difficult conditions in vacant and abandoned properties. When a building is left without heat for several years it's condition never improves. After residents move out it may sit for a while neatly boarded. But once the first vandal breaks in to ransack for valuables, it's a downhill spiral. Plumbing and electrical systems are stripped for the salvage value of copper and other metals. Drains start to freeze and roofs begin to leak. Water accumulates, timbers rot, mold grows and vermin inhabit the space.

TAP is working with Troy and Albany Land Banks to stabilize and renovate properties to prepare them for sale and to help market their availability. Visit your local land bank to see what is available.



Remembering Chico Christopher ...

With heavy hearts, we note the passing of G. Stephen Christopher. Chico spent his entire life befriending and advocating for those less fortunate than himself. He applied his talents as an architect improving the living conditions in neighborhoods that suffered disinvestment and neglect. Chico graduated from RPI's School of Architecture in 1971. While in college he worked as an intern at TAP. After college, Chico volunteered for the Peace Corps in Iran then, traveled through Europe and the Mid-East. Upon his return to Troy, he joined TAP full time. Since then, for 43 years, he never tired of helping people keep their properties safe and energy efficient. In late 2016, Chico left the office to battle a brain tumor, on January 9, 2017 he suffered a fatal heart attack. TAP has lost a great talent and a great friend.

Chico was not your average architect, he practiced activism. He advocated for his clients by assisting them in matters beyond their building needs to better their lives. He was an avid Boston Red Sox fan and organized yearly trips to Fenway Park for as many as 60 friends (including a few NY Yankee fans). Chico founded the Hutton Street Walkers softball team, which still plays after 30 years. Chico brought people together from all walks of life. He had a unique energy, easy laugh, dedication, wit, and

"Breathing Lights," from Pg.1

discrete histories and relationships within a greater dialogue. Nelson, embraced the project to engender community engagement. Combining their talents, the installation evolved into a platform to reinvigorate pockets of blighted neighborhoods. For viewers ..., qualms about being an interloper in these communities should be outweighed by the reality that positive transformation necessitates involvement and investment both from within and from outside these localities."

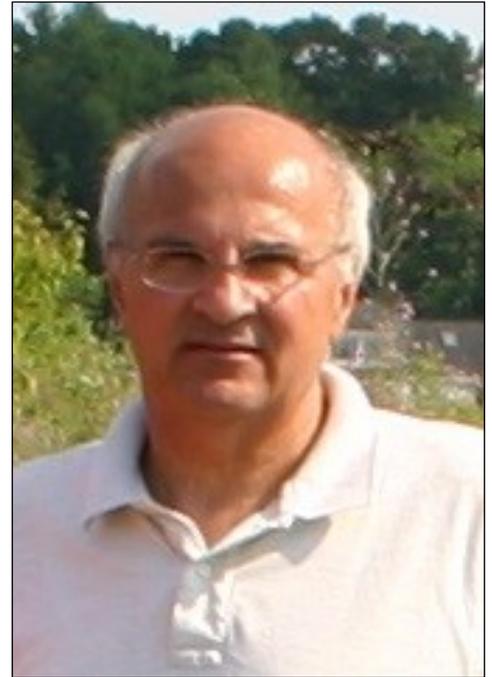
The project culminates on April 7, 2017 with a Finale of policy discussions and artist's performances at Proctor's in Schenectady. But the problem of vacancy and abandonment does not wrap up do neatly. The relationships built and the lessons learned through the Breathing Lights project position TAP well to continue our advocacy for inclusive and sustainable community development in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods .of Albany, Schenectady and Troy.

ability to seek common ground to resolve issues.

Beyond his generosity toward people, his commitment to protect the natural environment was his greatest passion. He loved horticulture and gardening and he worked tirelessly to promote the planting and protection of street trees in Troy. He served on the Board of Directors of Capital District Community Gardens, now Capital Roots, for many years. He volunteered with Rensselaer County Cooperative Extension as a Master Gardener, and he initiated the RPI Arboretum project. More recently he founded the Urban Forestry Advisory Board advising the City of Troy and the Troy Planning Commission on matters of urban landscape.

He was our very own "Lorax," protecting the urban tree canopy not only for its beauty but also for its role in helping to make our city a healthier place, for humans and all the other species without a voice.

In his honor, TAP Inc. has established a fund, Chico's GIFT, promoting Green Infrastructure for Troy. The fund will support a variety of projects, such as protection against EAB, a parasite that threatens thousands of Ash trees in the region, and the establishment of a street tree inventory in Troy. Chico was spearheading these efforts and we won't al-



G. Stephen Christopher 1948-2017

low them to lose steam. You can help his legacy of care and concern for the urban environment live on with a donation to: TAP Inc.- Chico's GIFT 210 River Street, Troy NY 12180.

Chico will be remembered as our dear friend, clever colleague, and hearty defender of the urban tree canopy. His passing reminds us to share precious moments with loved ones, to hug trees and to eat chocolate cake whenever it is offered us.

Rest in peace Chico. Rest in shade.

TAP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dennis M. Smith,
President
John Holehan
Vice President
Alice Rose
Acting Secretary
Al Wells
Treasurer
George Regan
Niki Haynes
Tim Bell

TAP STAFF

Barbara L. Nelson
Executive Director
Barbara Fama
Liza Rodriguez
Beth Steckley
Joel Altschul
Laura Ryder
Michael Lopez
Sophia Lane
Jason Damiani
210 River Street,
Troy NY 12180

SPECIAL THANKS TO

NYS Homes & Community Renewal,
*whose programs have supported
TAP's work since 1978.*